commonweal

The Editors
PURSUING STAR WARS

John Garvey
BEYOND ARMAGEDDON

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DECEMBER 20, 1985

Neville Braybrooke
Theology & horses
A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

Nancy Amidei
The caretakers

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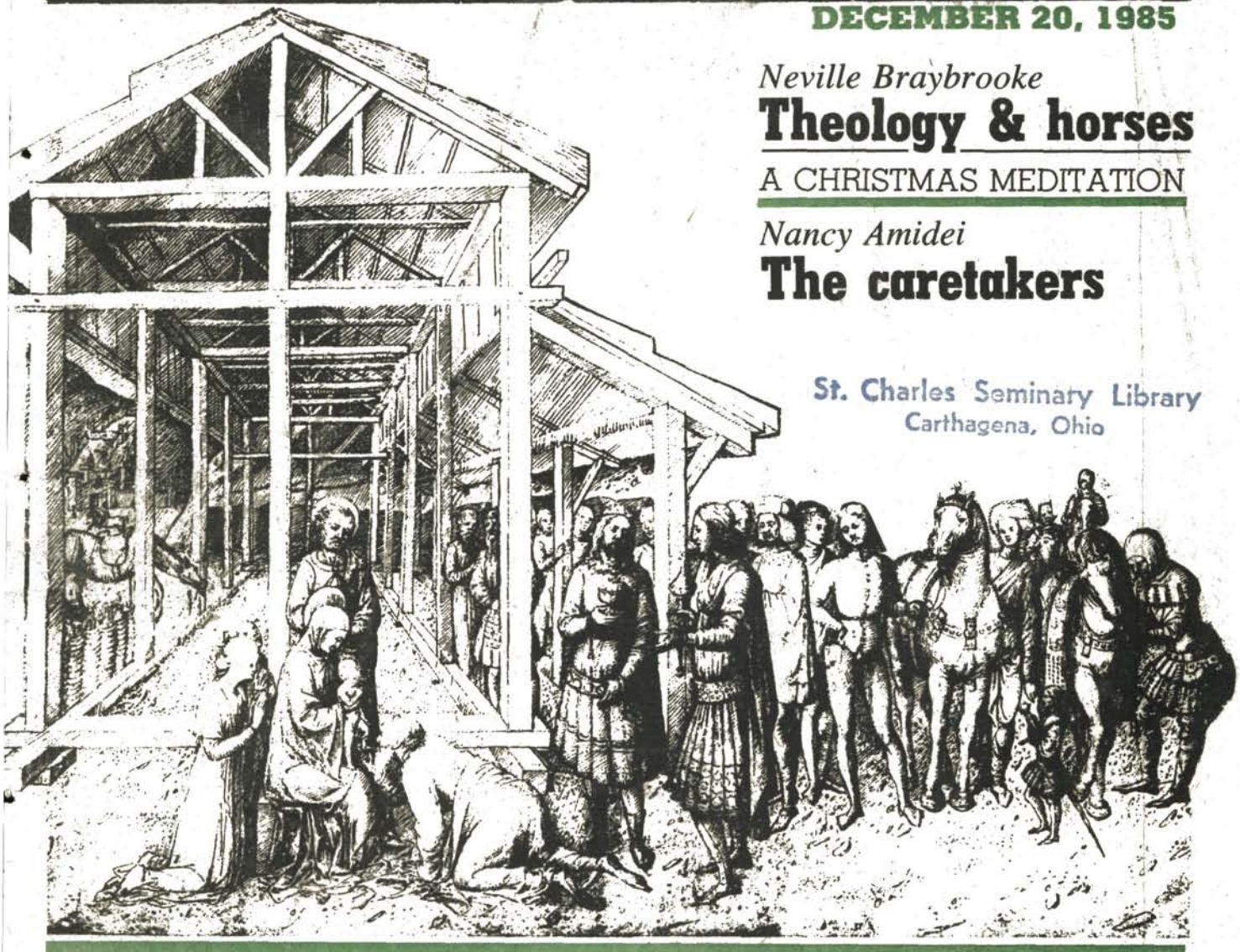

A SOBER LOOK AT THE SYNOD
PETER STEINFELS

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Correspondence

Spirit of tolerance

Harlem, N.Y.

To the Editors: The articles by various individuals relating to the topic, "From the Council to the Synod" were very profound and illuminating. The Second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII has had a profound effect upon me as a black and a Catholic by choice, as well as upon other blacks who have been attracted to the church. For me, the single greatest effect, I think, was the breath of fresh air that swept through the church in the matter of tolerance. This tolerance, espoused by the council, opened the door a little wider and encouraged others to attempt to come through.

GERALDINE L. DANIELS
Member
New York State Assembly

Distressing lacuna

Paris

To the Editors: Your October 18 issue on Vatican II and what it had meant to some *Commonweal* contributors was both interesting and distressing. As editor of Jules Isaac's works in the United States, I expected to find some mention, at least in one of the articles, of the breaking of the two-thousand-year-old deadlock of the church attitude regarding the Jews. As imperfect as it was, the Declaration on the Jews in *Nostra Aetate* was epoch-making; it marked a point of no return to the centuries of contempt, persecution, or indifference. From then on there would be ups and downs, wild hopes and bitter disappointments in Jewish-Christian relations; still a fraternal encounter has become possible as never before.

However, it does not seem to have struck a chord in the Catholics who reminisce in *Commonweal*. Their concern seems entirely personal, which, of course, is important but wholly insufficient in today's world. The Declaration on the Jews opened the way for the understanding, tragically delayed, that Israel is at the center of human destiny.

CLAIRE HUCHET-BISHOP

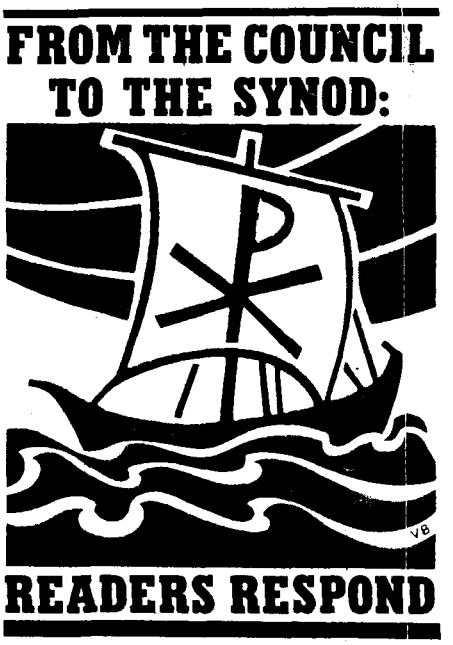
A testimony of riches

Minneapolis, Minn.

To the Editors: I have just read your October 18 issue — it has almost been an "ecclesial event" for me. I am deeply moved. Thank you ever so much for lifting up this rich, disparate lay voice of the church.

What a service to enable us all to hear these voices and to extend the conversation in the church beyond stereotypes and polarities. A healing publishing event.

As one ordained in 1965 who felt compelled to dissent from the teaching of



Humanae Vitae, but often in the wrong spirit, I am grateful I can read Juli Loesch's experience with respect and admiration sensing I still have much to learn, yet still formed by the experiences of those who gently chide Rome for the act of not listening to those who have the authority of the sacrament in their lived experience.

Vanier and Tom Fox! How privileged I am to be a part of a body that gives birth to such concrete faith and love. Thank you.

JIM EGAN, S.J.

The ninety-nine

Alexandria, Va.

To the Editors: Your series on the synod has been great. Your issue purporting to present the views of the general laity missed it. Perhaps the fault is mine: I thought you were going to present the views of the general laity. Instead, you present the views of non-ordained persons, most of them writers, most of them holding advanced degrees, many of them former seminarians or former women religious. That is a very, very small slice of "laity." All you have expressed is that *Commonweal* is as prone to tunnel vision as anyone else.

Those articles run the gamut of laical opinion from *A* to *B*. Ye gods and little fishes! Believe it or not, there are a lot of us out here who have no advanced degrees, have never thought ourselves "called," have never been able to write a book, have never started a Center for anything, have never advised a single high official. All we do is work. Work at our jobs during the day, at our parish churches during the evenings. We're the ones who pay the bills. We're the ones who stage the spaghetti dinners to support the parish shelter. We're the ones who daringly take a class in Bible study. We're the ones who feel at times like Rodney Dangerfield's weathervane. And more of the time like Rodney Dangerfield.

We're really nice people, once you get to know us. We get yanked around, patronized, disdained, demeaned, and still we keep showing up to pray for the world and ourselves, to iron the altar linens, to clean up the used tissues, to visit the sick, to give food for the hungry, and to do anything else that needs doing. We know that the main outcome of the synod will

(Continued on page 711)

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GOOD INTENTIONS, DANGEROUS RESULTS

IN REVIEWING the year 1985, perhaps the most significant date was March 23, 1983. At least in terms of the world's strategic stability — a matter that affects all life on this planet — President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) speech of March 1983 was a remarkable turning point. It stood American deterrent policy on its head: from one built on parity in offensive strategic nuclear forces, to one predicated on almost flawless defense. As this November's summit in Geneva made clear, 1985 was but a continuing response to the aftershocks of March 1983.

In October of this year the Pentagon disclosed its most recent plan for the SDI missile shield, composed of a system of seven layers of defense weapons and over a thousand space satellites. According to Kenneth L. Adelman, director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, its aim is to improve deterrence, strengthen stability, and reduce the risk of war. Is that what is happening?

The first, most challenging determination to make about SDI is to separate fact from sentiment. Mr. Reagan's dream of SDI may be rooted in good intentions, but it is riddled with inconsistencies. Look at the record:

● In November, prior to his meeting with Mr. Gorbachev, the president told four Soviet reporters, "We won't put this weapon — or this system — in place, this defense system, until we do away with our nuclear missiles, our offensive missiles." Did he say the dismantling of our *total* offensive strategic missile force?

● Mr. Reagan told the same journalists that the U.S. would make SDI "available to other countries, including the Soviet Union. . . ." This is highly improbable. (Perhaps burdened with the recent spate of espionage leaks, the president was merely anticipating that he ought to offer foreign governments what they would be getting soon enough on their own?)

● The president does not always admit what he knows very well: that this country cannot rely on defenses alone; that nuclear weapons will most likely never entirely be done away with; that to share a defensive strategy with one's adversary who holds a relative offensive advantage is to invite blackmail.

● Mr. Reagan has said that his dream is to protect the populations of the U.S. and its allies from a strategic attack. But this is fundamentally unrealistic, as the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment made clear in its report this year, "Ballistic Missile Defense Technologies." SDI can't come close to being a shield for total populations. What it becomes instead is simply a BMD — Ballistic Missile Defense, heightening Soviet apprehensions and decreasing stability.

● Mr. Reagan has also said repeatedly that SDI will be non-nuclear. Yet one of the chief elements now proposed for SDI is the so-called x-ray laser. It relies on a nuclear explosion for its power.

● Finally, in an unguarded moment, Mr. Reagan referred to SDI as a weapon. His slip disclosed something about SDI's inherent offensive character. A shield is

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never simply a shield. It becomes an active element in combat and planning.

The great turnabout represented by SDI is clearly evident in measuring SDI against the ABM treaty of 1972. While it is true that nothing Mr. Reagan has proposed to date is in violation of that treaty, after several more years of continuing research, that will no longer be the case. The treaty bans all space-based ABM systems, both their development and testing. In the last six months, as Gerard C. Smith has pointed out, the Reagan administration has introduced a new element of uncertainty in international affairs by questioning the ABM treaty. It has argued that while the U.S. has maintained a strict interpretation of the treaty, it could legitimately interpret it far less rigorously. According to Smith, the present strict policy could be reversed "by a stroke of Mr. Reagan's pen."

While it is troubling to see valuable treaties compromised to accommodate changed strategic policy, it would not do well to miss the pressures being brought to bear on other segments of our society (as well as abroad) to garner endorsement for SDI. SDI could become the single biggest weapons program in the nation's history. According to James A. Ionson, the administration's official in charge of organizing universities to tackle specific SDI projects, "There will be many, many Manhattan projects in this." The prospect is so inviting, says Mr. Ionson, "virtually everyone, on every campus, wants to get involved."

That is an overstatement, as protests from a number of universities, their faculties, and students have made honorably clear. Yet the growing role of the Pentagon in national economic development cannot be minimized. In the late 1970s, only about half of federally sponsored research was defense related; now it is 70 percent. Pentagon spending on campuses has increased 89 percent in the last five years. And the SDI office alone has budgeted $600 million for university research over the next five years. This raises a variety of concerns, not the least of which are the aims and purposes of universities in democratic societies.

A corollary to this massive seduction by research dollars has occurred in the federal government's own laboratory system. In 1980, two laws were passed encouraging the transfer of government technology into the private sector by allowing federal laboratories and individual employees to retain title to inventions. Employees are now allowed to use inventions devised on public time and with public funds and to parlay them into personally enriching inventions for public consumption. This, of course, stands normal business practice on its head. Ideologically speaking, however, individual entrepreneurship has won a significant boost — at the expense of the public.

Finally, the big companies desperately want a piece of SDI. They know that's where the action is going to be because, in the near term, defense dollars will have to remain relatively fixed. SDI is the president's darling. It doesn't take a weather satellite to know which way the bucks are blowing.

Interested and powerful, the large defense contractors are nonetheless vulnerable. At this historic moment, 45 of the nation's top 100 military contractors are under criminal investigation for a variety of charges. The administrator of NASA, James M. Beggs, recently took a leave of absence to defend himself against charges of illegally billing the army when he was with the General Dynamics Corporation.

Last August, in another turn of events, Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger was forced to cancel the Sergeant York program, a gun project being developed to protect U.S. tanks. The Sergeant York's problem was that (after $1.8 billion had been spent) the gun's 2.5-mile range was short of the 3.25 miles needed to hit a Soviet helicopter. Reasonable enough. But not so reasonable was the Pentagon's inability to devise suitable testing for its weapons designs long before papering the field with $1.8 billion.

The problem exposed by the Sergeant York fiasco is that the defense system relies on itself, and those who have just passed through its revolving door to the defense contractors establishment, to make disinterested judgments about billion-dollar military projects. But that's impossible. At the least, it should provide a lesson about auditing the vast sums planned for SDI.

Will SDI improve deterrence, strengthen stability, and reduce the risk of war? According to the Congressional Office on Technology Assessment, SDI "might make nuclear war between the U.S. and the USSR more likely. . . ." Switching to defense would prove to be, in Paul Nitze's phrase, "a tricky transition." At any time, one side or the other might be tempted to take advantage of a supposed vulnerability. Furthermore, the untested nature of SDI raises serious questions — can we presume the remarkably complex computer systems that will have to be developed will work flawlessly? What of human error in the programming process? And what of maintaining the programs' total secrecy? It would seem that the admirable dream of SDI neither strengthens stability, reduces the riskof war, nor improves deterrence. What, then, to do?

- At the present time, there exists both a relative nuclear symmetry and parity. (This is evident because both the U.S. and the USSR are confident enough about their deterrent capabilities to be talking about 50 percent reductions in offensive nuclear weapons.) To accomplish such reductions should be the first order of business in the coming year.
- The 1972 ABM Treaty should be reaffirmed and clarified. Both sides have been developing ABM technologies within the bounds of the existing treaty. That policy should be a continuing hedge to keep both sides alert to what its opposition might be doing.
- Congress should maintain scrupulous oversight of all SDI programs and funding. It should reduce present appropriations to what has been adequate in recent years to keep the U.S. ahead in all areas of defense research: about $1 billion a year.
- Finally, we should agree to a moratorium on all nuclear testing, and begin work on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

If these suggestions were to be pursued in 1986, the world would likely be a safer place next Christmas. Then March 23, 1983 would be seen in proper perspective: the day a speech was given which, when later turned on its head, produced enough wisdom for the remainder of a decade.

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Interview with Ian Paisley

NECESSITY OF VIOLENCE

WHEN LONDON NODS TO DUBLIN

BRITISH AIRWAYS was running a special promotion on its London to Belfast route. The price was good even if the name was unfortunate: it's called the "firecracker fare." At London's Heathrow airport, there is a special section for passengers to Belfast. It's called a "lounge" and offers the amenities — coffee, stout, and sandwiches. But the real business of the place is not succor but security. All bags must pass through an x-ray and a hand check. There is a serious body search, no mere pass with a metal detector. Even coat linings are turned inside out.

On November 9, six days before the signing of the historic Anglo-Irish agreement on Northern Ireland, I was in that lounge when Ian Paisley strode in. I was surprised to find him alone and unguarded. Paisley is tall, self-contained, remarkably well-dressed, even natty, for a champion of the working class. Nearing sixty, he's heavy but not fat and combs his white hair straight back. In style, theologically and politically, he's been compared to Jerry Falwell. But there is none of the "good old boy" quality about him. He sat behind a wall of his own making in that lounge. Still, when a stranger with a Northern Irish accent approached, Paisley did not retreat. The Northerner told him that an American reporter wished to speak with him. Would he agree? Yes, he would. But the presenter felt it more politic to slur my last name — too obviously Irish Catholic.

Once into the interview, such caution was unnecessary. Paisley spoke in a prepared statement style — the same for everyone. It went like this: "Eire" had placed itself outside the community of civilized nations by its covert and overt support for the IRA terrorists. Neither the Irish police nor army had any real commitment to stopping terrorists. The British government doesn't understand what it is up against. They want to "be nice to the IRA. Serve sticky buns and tea." The soft, pampered English politicians, he suggested, would never be able to stand up to the "hard men" of the North. These seemed to be himself on the one side and the IRA on the other.

I had always wondered why Paisley focused so much on the IRA Provos and why he identified them so closely with the people and the government of the Irish Republic. All but the most dense tourists to Ireland, no matter what notions they hold before arriving, are barely out of Shannon airport before it's clear to them that among the people of the Republic there is no widespread support for IRA violence in the North. Last June when Sinn Fein candidates ran in the local elections in the South, they received a miniscule share of the vote. When the nationalist parties, North and South, met to frame the New Ireland Forum two years ago, they refused participation to any party that espoused violence. Sinn Fein could not attend. Did Paisley really believe that Northern Catholic SDLP politicians, like John Hume or Seamus Mallon, constantly villified by the IRA for their stand against violence, were actually secret allies of the Provos?

When I talked with Paisley, the light dawned. He *needs* the IRA. Their bombs and bullets justify his diatribes and the threats of counterviolence they contain. The pope used to serve as the enemy against whom Ulster men could rally. He represented an overwhelming power for evil which made any intransigence, any excessive reaction on their part, seem excusable. But people all over the world were flocking to the pope these days. He was kissing babies on TV. Another enemy, just as formidable, was necessary. The Provisional IRA serves that function nicely, especially if they can be seen not as an extreme faction but as the true expression of the Northern Catholic population.

Surely Paisley knew that when John Hume ran against Martin McGuiness for the House of Commons seat in the heavily Catholic constituency of Foyle, Hume received over 70 percent of the vote. But facts don't really matter when it comes to casting all papists as Feinian terrorists. The reasoning also makes any agreement with the Irish government a deal with the devil.

I SAW Paisley again on November 15, the day Garret FitzGerald and Margaret Thatcher met to sign the agreement. The deal with the devil was to be sealed at a place sacred to the unionist tradition, Hillsborough Castle, the queen's residence in the North. Unionists feel very proprietary about the queen. It is to her that they pledge their loyalty, not to Parliament, not to fellow citizens of the United Kingdom. Too many of the latter, after all, are immigrants from places like Pakistan. Just give them the queen and Ulster, thank you.

Hillsborough Castle and its environs had been sealed off the night before. Some fifty Unionist supporters had spent the night and when the press corps arrived they were ready. "No Pope here," they screamed in an echo of an early Thatcher statement on Anglo-Irish cooperation, "Out, Out, Out." But this year there would be no off-the-cuff remarks by the prime minister. Senior civil servants on both sides had spent five years working on this agreement. It would go forward.

Paisley and the Unionists did try to stop it. He and James Molyneaux arrived outside Hillsborough Castle full of threats and dire predictions. Margaret Thatcher was a betrayer, and anyone who respected the agreement was a quisling, Paisley told the crowd. If Parliament ratified the agreement all the Unionist MPs would quit. They would withdraw from any contact with representatives of Britain.

And, Paisley added, they would fight. I asked what he

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meant by "fight." He told me, "Look it up in the dictionary." A demonstrator holding an "Out, Out, Out," placard was more specific. The men of Ulster would kill rather than cooperate with Dublin. And whom would they kill? I expected him to answer the IRA or the Dublin representatives who would come to Belfast. Oh, aye, he agreed, he would like to see that crowd dead, but his real ire was directed elsewhere. "Them," he said, indicating the nearby line of Royal Ulster Constabulary. "We've left them alone up to now, but if they remain in a police force where Dublin has any say at all. . . . Well, dear, we know them. They live in Loyalist areas. We will get them."

"You would assassinate the police?"

"Aye, dear."

A solid line of RUC officers was listening to every word of this exchange. Now the unwritten law in the North is that one does not talk or make eye contact with either the police or the soldiers. It makes it less awkward if when passing a traffic policeman dressed in a flak jacket and rifle on the ready you merely pretend he is not there. At this moment I had to ignore the convention. What did these men feel when they heard such talk from their fellow Protestant Unionist? "How did they take it?" I asked. No reply, at first. Then one answered, "We take it with contempt."

That was a key statement. If the police take with "contempt" the threats of their co-religionist who saw progress toward reconciliation as nothing but treason, then truly history was being made at Hillsborough. MARY PAT KELLY

(Mary Pat Kelly is a screenwriter with Columbia Pictures and a filmmaker who has just completed a documentary, "To Live for Ireland.")

Social activism today

THE CARETAKERS

NO GREAT AMERICAN SELLOUT

I'VE HEARD IT; you've heard it; everybody knows it. In the 1980s, everybody cares only about themselves. We've all sold out for greed. The country has become a bastion of self-centered, egomaniacal yuppies. I don't like to sound out of touch, but I don't buy it.

It certainly isn't true of students. In Philadelphia, law students from both the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University are operating "food stamp clinics" in low-income downtown neighborhoods. Their counterparts from the medical school are working with the city's homeless, many of whom live on the streets near their classrooms. There are social work students in Michigan working to locate affordable housing for people, while others in the school of public health have designed a survey to determine the extent of stunted growth and malnutrition among low-income children. It was a Dallas student who carried out that city's hunger survey.

There are *real* differences between students in the 1960s and now, but activism isn't one of them. Even then, only 10-20 percent of students could have been described as "activists." That's not surprising; no matter how popular a cause, you would never expect to find most of any group among the activists. But student activism in the 1960s tended to focus on one or two issues: civil rights, and U.S. involvement in Vietnam. And when even 10 or 20 percent of a student body of 30,000 gets involved you get a real sense of critical mass, of thousands of people.

Today, if you were to add up all the students engaged in some activist effort, I suspect you'd come to the same 10-20 percent, but they'd be scattered over thirty or forty issues: acid rain, women's rights, South Africa, Central America, animal rights, the nuclear threat, abortion (pro and con), defense-related research, and a couple dozen more. Instead of drawing thousands, each draws hundreds or dozens, so they — and we — never get that sense of critical mass.

Meanwhile, the real news in social activism is being made off-campus, in some of the most established institutions of our society. Think for a minute about what happened after Congress required reviews of everyone getting Disability Insurance benefits, and the Reagan administration got them underway with rather more haste than good judgment in 1981. The disability community — a disproportionately unwealthy, unpowerful group that still finds itself unwelcome in many places — organized. Before long, they and their allies had succeeded in getting governors, judges, state legislators, and attorneys general in nearly half the states to agree that they would *not* carry out the law because it was harmful to disabled people. That was an extraordinary example of civil disobedience on a massive scale, occurring among Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, and on behalf of a group of social welfare clients in a program governed by public policies and tax revenues. Moreover, all this happened at a time when the very notion of public social programs was under attack. Passive? Uncaring? Hardly.

At the same time, our supposedly passive, sold-out, greedy contemporaries are staffing soup kitchens, food pantries, and food banks, in towns and cities of every size. There are emergency shelters for abused and battered women and children. There are shelters for the homeless, and hotlines for people in crisis. All together they may not add up to anything that one could call a "system," and no one would claim they are meeting all the need, but they are there, staffed by a combination of volunteers and under-paid serfs, on shoe-string budgets in frequently terrible working conditions, day after day, week after week, in the 1980s. For the record, many of the people making up the bags of emergency groceries or cleaning the soup kitchen after the meals are people who've eaten those meals or had to depend on emergency groceries. Poor people are among those helping poor people in the 1980s.

But that's not all. Churches and congregations have been declaring themselves sanctuaries to protect political refugees from Central America; farmers have stormed state capitols

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across the Midwest while back in their rural, conservative communities mental health and other social services have sprung up; and for over a year mayors, senators, and countless others have been offering themselves for arrest outside the embassy of South Africa and its consulates across the country to protest apartheid, while a growing list of universities, professional associations (including the American Bar Association) and pension funds have voted to divest their holdings in South Africa even if it means taking a financial loss.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM is taking new forms in the 1980s: mass marches and law suits are not as common as they once were. But activism, risk-taking on behalf of others, commitment to causes and issues on behalf of vulnerable people are hardly dead. What we're seeing instead is a variant on what former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson once said about the civil rights movement: "We aren't in the streets, we're in office."

Much of the new social activism has (or quickly acquires) a distinctly political focus. In Texas, a broad range of groups and individuals came together over the past few years to win passage of several dramatic social welfare victories, including: a new Indigent Health Care bill that provides an additional $145 million (half of it federal) and requires for the first time that county hospitals treat poor people; an Omnibus Hunger Bill that provides $11.5 million to supplement various federal food programs (most notably WIC and meals for senior citizens), helps to defray the costs of emergency food providers, and requires that local welfare agencies give food stamps within twenty-four hours to families in dire emergencies; and, two welfare grant increases in as many years. In Chicago there is now an Interagency Hunger Network that has divided up responsibility for the city, and is pressing responsible government agencies with the same vigor as it is pressing its own private and voluntary members, in order to see that emergency needs will be met. That city's public colleges now offer five free credit hours to public aid recipients to help them get back on their feet. In Massachusetts and New York state funds are being used to alert unemployed families that they may be eligible for food stamps, and in Washington and Iowa two-parent families may once again get welfare and Medicaid. Tennessee's legislature was persuaded to take the sales tax off food, and raise its very low welfare benefits, and social activists nationwide have won new state laws for the protection of abused and battered women and children. That's hardly evidence of a passive society where nobody cares enough to get involved.

Nor does it reflect an acceptance of the idea that government no longer has a role to play in meeting the needs of the people in crisis. Earlier this year the *Los Angeles Times* conducted a poll of 2,446 Americans and found:

> Seventy-three percent of the public favors government action on behalf of the poor, and 57 percent would even be willing to approve a 1 percent federal sales tax to pay for it.

Among those commenting on the poll and its findings were fellows at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington, who noted:

> Americans . . . believe that it is proper and necessary for the federal government to take action to help the poor, even if its record in this area is not encouraging. . . . While practical judgments about what government can do to fight poverty may have changed, the moral consensus has not. [And while] skeptical that much can be done in the future. . . . they do not feel this justifies abandoning the effort.

At Christmastime, 1985, this may be the best present the newest generation of social activists has to offer our fellow citizens in trouble: hope that someone still cares.

NANCY AMIDEI

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

BEYOND ARMAGEDDON

THE POSSIBILITY OF WISDOM

THE MOST distressing moral feature of the age is our ability to become numb. I don't mean to say that other ages were good at paying attention to horror. They may very well have been worse. It is easy to imagine villagers along the Irish coast not caring after the third or fourth Viking raid, however high the level of rape and murder. Not caring is one way of dealing with horror. Apparently a third of the people in the world afflicted with the black plague died of it, and fear of the plague and an inability to control it produced predictions of the end of the world and weird religious excesses.

Our age is horrible, in some ways uniquely so. But it really isn't possible to say that the human race has become worse in recent years, given its past of pious slavers and people like St. Joan of Arc's murderous pedophile friend Gilles de Rais. That mixture of sanctity and murder always struck me as monstrous. Monstrosity, like the poor, we will have always with us. So will we have our ability to become numb. We are, as a species, as awful now as we ever were in our history. The Psalms that rejoice in the murder of the enemy's children, the passions that any war unleashes, seem to be constants. One myth — the myth of progress — has us getting better. There is another myth, an ancient one, which sees humanity as a species fallen from a golden age. We were better once; the "once" may have been during the Apostolic or Victorian or pioneer era, but it was better than now, whenever it was. As someone who is convinced that we were

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never any good, I find the golden age myth silly.

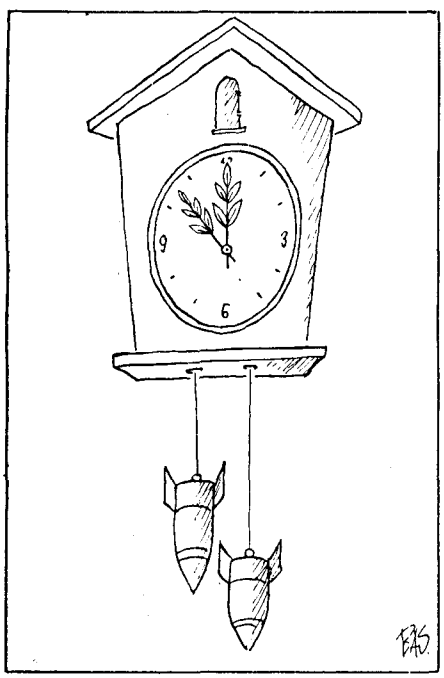
I prefer one which St. Paul seems to have acknowledged (when he recommended a hymn which says, "Sleepers, awake!") and which some early Christians, gnostics among them, found compelling. That is the myth (the story we explain ourselves to ourselves with) which compares ordinary waking human consciousness to a form of dreaming or sleepwalking or drunkenness. It seems true to our experience, especially to all the forms of self-deception which inform our personal and public lives, and the numbness which surrounds so much of our waking awareness is an increasing indication that the metaphors of dream and sleepwalk are accurate enough.

What makes our age unique is not how horrible we are — that is the constant — but the fact that our worst self-deception and delusion have a demonic technological echo now. We really can bring many of our darkest dreams to life. It is possible for the human race to end all life on earth, at least its own (and I am enough of a species-centered sort to find that tragedy enough). The evil which sets in with becoming numb about this—and it is very hard given the onslaught of bare desperate data not to become numb—is the fact that we are distracted from our own responsibility. It is a responsibility not only in the political sense — that is, in some ways, the numbest end of the spectrum — but one which involves outrage and imagination, a sensitivity and intelligence and anger which should precede politics. Works of imagination are ways of wrenching the artist and the artist's audience awake. At its worst a work of disturbing art leaves the participant (at either the creative or receiving end) satisfied that he or she, at least, has kept faith and responded with the proper outraged or horrified emotion. At its best it is like the irritant which creates the pearl in the oyster. It isn't up to anyone to say exactly what such art should do; it is enough to know that something has been started.

In 1959 a fine, strange, powerful book appeared. Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* told of a post-atomic world, determined to destroy itself all over again after one total war. Miller's book appeared to good reviews in the general press and was praised, quite deservedly, by C.S. Lewis and Walker Percy.

Abigail McCarthy will resume her column after a leave of several months.

Now Miller has joined Martin J. Greenberg in editing an anthology, *Beyond Armageddon* (Donald I. Fine, Inc., $18.95), and has written an introduction. The book is about what nuclear war would do to us — or rather, it is about the mythology, since Megawar (a term Miller prefers to the too-easy "holocaust," with good reason) will not leave any life around to record itself. The forms the mythology takes are spelled out here in science fiction and fantasy, not all of it of equal quality, but all of it deserving some attention. The worst science fiction is like the worst of O. Henry — too pointed and sentimental. (Someday someone should do a comparison of Ray Bradbury and O. Henry, the best and the worst stuff of both.) Some of that is here. The best science fiction (I think especially of the writing of the late Philip K. Dick, and of classics like *A Canticle for Leibowitz*) is ignored by people who should be reading it. In Miller's anthology there are stories by J.G. Ballard and Jim Aikin which prove the point. The Aikin story, "My Life in the Jungle," is particularly good.



Miller ends the collection with this chilling fable — one which begins on a deceptively easy, even whimsical note — and he couldn't have made a more disturbing, or more appropriate, choice.

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Miller tells of an order of monks who preserve what knowledge they can salvage from the ruined civilization which preceded them, but do it with a wisdom and balance which the cultures surrounding them lack. There is, with all the anger and near desperation, a hope for wisdom. Miller's introduction to *Beyond Armageddon* is as angry as *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was, but, I think, exhibits less hope. Still there is a hope that wisdom might be possible. Miller traces our problem to the defeat of compassion (identified with the original wholeness pointed to in the *Tao Te Ching*) by Logos, or reason — a rending of reason from its divine source.

The occasion for his anger is clear and right:

> When human extinction (as a result of a decision) is assigned a probability, however small, and a *finite* negative value, however large, and these two quantities are multiplied, and added to a list of other such products to obtain the expectation for a given political or military decision, the statistician and his employer should be detected, apprehended, and led away in strait jackets to the nearest lobotomy ward. Such people are not just running loose in Washington and Moscow, they're running things.

What we need is a determined remembering, a return of reason to its source, a recovery of wisdom. This calls for an awakening, what some Eastern Christian writers have called "the descent of the mind into the heart." The anger which informs Miller's work — first *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and now the introduction to *Beyond Armageddon*, and the stories collected there — makes it unlike ordinary writing, even ordinary polemical writing. It's more like a warning shot. The only hope is that wisdom might still be a collective human possibility.

JOHN GARVEY

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Church/world watch

The summit & the synod

J. Bryan Hehir

AS THIS COLUMN is written, the summit in Geneva has just ended and the synod in Rome is about to begin. Geneva reminds us that 1985 marks the fortieth anniversary of the nuclear age. Rome recalls the twentieth anniversary of Vatican II. The significance of the summit and the synod extends far beyond the lives of the participants. Although the rest of us watch the proceedings from afar, those two meetings and the historical issues they address will shape our fate and future.

Both the summit and the synod should be seen as moments in a larger historical setting. Neither is capable of settling the issues on its agenda. But it is useful to think of the two — summit and synod — in tandem.

The summit should be evaluated at two levels: political and strategic. On the political level a consensus judgment of approval of the summit is easy to achieve for two reasons: expectations were very low and specific agreements were not needed to claim a success. After six years of deafening silence between the superpowers, punctuated only by derogatory comments, the two heads of state met like statesmen. With this background, expectations were so minimal that the meeting was hailed as "historic" before the event occurred.

This inclination to settle for a meeting of the superpowers as an accomplishment in itself is understandable. Regular meetings at the highest level should be a standard operating procedure. One could lament that it has taken six years to relearn that there is no alternative to these summits, but the lament should not detract from support for a process which must be encouraged on all fronts.

The political dialogue must continue because the standards of success at the strategic level are much higher. The test here is not personal encounters or atmosphere or facility of communication, but specific issues of arms control. At this level, judgments of success must pass the test of principles agreed upon, decisions made, and treaties signed and ratified. In these terms, Geneva highlighted the cost of six years of superpower silence, of strategic programs begun and pursued with minimal restraint. The impact of this on the summit's outcome was summarized by Walter Pincus in *The Washington Post*: "the superpowers remain essentially where they were before Geneva, in the midst of ambitious programs to modernize their nuclear weapons and delivery systems and . . . far apart on all proposals for negotiated reductions."

This judgment starkly illustrates the paucity of Geneva's final accomplishments. There is no escape from the long road, begun over twenty years ago, to constrain and cut the nuclear arsenals of the world. Whenever the superpowers walk away from the discipline of seeking control, they find that, sooner or later, they must return to the process. There are people in places of authority in both superpowers who do not believe this. They think arms control is a favor to others, or a façade at best. As long as views like these have credibility, periodic summits will yield the negligible results of Geneva. The moral implications of continuing to see control of the arms race as a secondary objective (to modernization) or as a threat to security were clearly stated by Vatican II: "The people of our time must realize that they have to give a somber reckoning of these deeds of war, for the course of the future will depend greatly on the decisions they make today."

This contrast between where Geneva leaves us and where the council calls us is a good place to link the synod and the summit. The synod, too, faces a broad agenda. Its basic task is to commemorate Vatican II and to assess the post-conciliar developments. Like the summit, the synod has an assignment which exceeds its grasp. Exploring the theology of Vatican II and evaluating the pastoral practice of the church since the council is not a task for a two-week synod. Like the summit, however, the synod can set a tone and establish themes which need not have specific policy conclusions to be helpful.

What kind of signals the synod sends — what tone and direction it communicates — will be its major function. In spite of generous amounts of commentary no one can really predetermine the dynamic of the synod's debate. It will have a life of its own and then, most likely, the Holy Father will give the synod's deliberations a distinct form in a document.

One memory from Vatican II is sparked by seeing the summit and the synod in tandem. The synod, like the council, will be ecclesial in theme. But Vatican II spoke of the church in terms which pushed ecclesial concerns far beyond the bounds of ecclesiastical issues. The vision of ecclesial ministry stretched as the council moved from *Lumen Gentium* in the first session to *Gaudium et Spes* in the final session. The council renewed the internal life of the church in a striking manner. But the direction it provided for the church's role in the world, and the consequences that direction has had from Washington to Warsaw, from the Soviet Union to São Paulo, were the grand surprises of Vatican II. The results of the synod will be somewhat clear as this is published. I have no prediction, only a criterion by which we need to measure the product of the synod: That it continue to shape a church which not only worships well and teaches clearly but can provide moral direction to a world which will have to foresee several more nuclear summits.

J. BRYAN HEHIR

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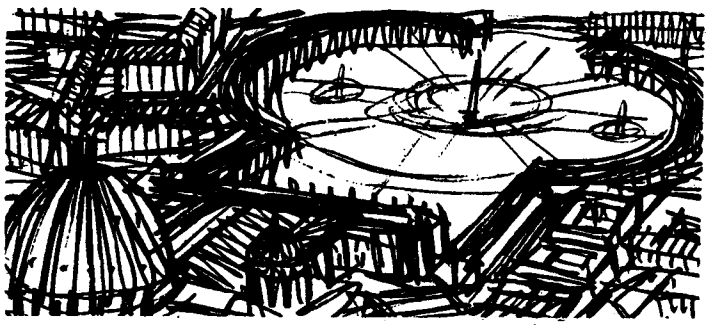
CONFLICTS & CODE WORDS: A SOBER LOOK AT THE SYNOD



So far, so good, so what

PETER STEINFELS

WHEN I RETURNED from Rome after the first week of the synod, my eye caught the covers of two newsweeklies sitting side by side on an office shelf. "Church in Crisis" read the headline on *Newsweek*'s December 9 issue. Next to it an older issue of *Time*, with a cover story on the East-West summit, declared, "So Far, So Good."

"So Far, So Good" was what I felt about the extraordinary synod at that moment. But any such judgment, I realized, rested largely on what one's expectations had been. The pope's own stated aims, in announcing the synod, were sufficiently positive — that it would review the work of Vatican II; that it would try to apply the council's vision to the church's present situation; that it might revive something of the council's spirit. But what could this ringing announcement realistically mean? Time for preparing the synod was short. Time for the synod to do its work would be practically nonexistent. The process of shaping the agenda was almost entirely in the hands of the pope and the Curia. No informed person could have accepted the idea that the pope wanted to "bury" the council. But there should also be no underestimating the vast differences that can exist in interpreting an event as complex as Vatican II. The issue is one of "co-opting" rather than burying the council's truly pioneering steps, assimilating them to a largely pre-conciliar vision of the church. The pope might not have intended anything beyond his broad aims. That still left a vacuum to be filled by others.

It was not surprising, then, that at least one level of expectation was almost purely defensive. It would suffice if the synod were not to become an occasion for closing the windows John XXIII had opened, nor for a decisive display of papal prerogative that would have broken the independent spirit of bishops' conferences.

Less purely defensive but still modest were the hopes that the synod would unmistakably reaffirm Vatican II in the face of those who continued to look with suspicion on its legacy. If it would simply agree in broad terms, as Bishop James W. Malone put it, that the church was "on the right path," if it would restore lagging hopes for ecumenism, if it would recognize the legitimacy of episcopal conferences, and if it would solidify the place of the synod itself as a factor in the church's governance, then it would have done as much as could be reasonably demanded.

There was, of course, a third level of expectation. The synod should take on basic problems confronting the church — the role of women, the rethinking of sexuality. It should escape the "churchy" issues altogether and address the needs of the poor, the threat of nuclear destruction. Or it should take up concrete measures of institutional reform, providing local churches with greater power over the selection of bishops, transforming the synod itself into a deliberative body. The problem with this level of expectation was that it came flat up against the constraints of time and even representivity within which the synod had to operarate.

IF ANY single event shaped anticipations about the synod, it was the widely cited interview that Cardinal Ratzinger granted an Italian journalist last spring, later expanded and published as a book in several languages. In Ratzinger, liberals found an ally *malgré lui*. Ratzinger said out loud what much of the Curia believes but prefers to keep quiet. In expounding his ideas openly, the cardinal offered liberals a target. His glum and sweeping estimation that the council's promise stood betrayed in almost every direction — and by bishops' conferences as well as unruly theologians — rallied opponents of the conservative agenda. Criticism of Ratzinger, moreover, could be easily distinguished from criticism of the pope.

Had the pope in fact approved Ratzinger's initiative, blessed it as a trial balloon? In Rome, opinions were divided. A man of Ratzinger's position and views, I was told, would never have given such an interview without clearing it first with the Holy Father — and certainly would not have followed the interview with the book. One rumor had it that John Paul II had himself gone over the galleys. A Northern Europe priest, long active at the Vatican and no fan of Ratzinger, scoffed at these reports.

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The old theology prof, he surmised, would not have felt in need of a papal okay to express his opinions.

Ratzinger's offensive may have backfired. But it had at least one strong effect on the discussion preceding the synod. Not only did people divide over the degree of difficulties experienced by the post-conciliar church — the overworked distinction between "optimists" and "pessimists" — they also lined up behind one or the other of two explanations for these difficulties. No one, of course, blamed the problems on the council itself; that was off-limits, at least in public. One explanation, therefore, maintained that post-conciliar disarray was due to "misinterpretations of the council." The alternative ascribed such problems to cultural and social factors in the world outside the church and unrelated to Vatican II.

Both explanations obviously had some validity. Curiously missing, however, was a third explanation. One had only to think back to the immediate post-conciliar period. The implementation of Vatican II was frequently half-hearted, uncomprehending, begrudging, authoritarian. The council had launched a revolution of rising expectations; its aftermath was often a tale of dashed hopes. The council had enrolled Catholics in a crash course in modernity — a decade to deal with all that had racked Protestant Christianity for over a century. The task would have been daunting enough for a leadership that unmistakably identified itself with the energies the council had released. In reality, the church's leadership let much of its credibility drain away as it balked, scolded, and seemed to ignore much of the council's vision. Those were years of frustration, polarization, bitterness, overreaction. Much of that could have been tempered by a leadership felt to be steering the way and not just applying the brakes.

Perhaps it was tact that kept virtually everyone from mentioning this "missing explanation" either in the pre-synod discussions or, as far as an outsider could deduce, during the synod's deliberations themselves. Why reopen old wounds? Unfortunately, the discreet silence thereby passed over a factor still very much in today's church. Peremptory and unilateral orders undermine the credibility of authority and discredit the reasonable requirements for a common faith and discipline.

NOT REOPENING these wounds may have been part of the price to pay for the synod's distinct turn to the middle. That turn became visible with the appointment of Cardinal Godfried Danneels, of Brussels, to the key post of synod *rapporteur*, and the appointment of Father Walter Kasper, theologian from Tubingen, as synod special secretary. The pope's homily at the opening Mass carefully avoided sending signals that might restrict the bishops' deliberations. The night before the synod set to work, I heard Walter Kasper observe that the summary he had drawn up of the reports from episcopal conferences around the world was "sufficiently optimistic." The introductory report Cardinal Danneels had based on it skillfully balanced positive and negative elements. At an opening press conference, the Belgian cardinal insisted on the synod's freedom of debate. He also referred with more than usual frankness to what he called an inevitable tension between "Peter and the apostles," between Rome and the local churches. Theology could help us understand this tension "between two truths" but could never quite resolve it.

The week that followed was a demonstration of what Cardinal Danneels had called the "geography of problems." Africa, Asia, and the numerous Eastern rites enjoyed proportionally greater representation here than they would have at a regular synod, let alone at a council. It was salutary for Americans to be reminded of the problems facing churches which had only recently managed to get the Scriptures translated into hundreds of local languages, or where Christianity represents not only a statistical minority but an alien culture. Collegiality, however, was the issue that stretched across continents. It was the intermediate issue — the gatekeeper question — that would determine how all those other specific questions, so notable by their absence, from sexual morality to nuclear arms, would be approached in practice.

LATIN WAS THE official language of the synod, although many bishops chose to speak in English, Italian, Spanish, French, or German, and simultaneous translation was available to all. At one point, after Cardinal Basil Hume of Westminster had finished speaking, Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, primate of Ireland, took the floor and wittily indicated his choice of language by saying "I prefer to speak in the language of Cardinal Hume."

When it came to the central question of collegiality, however, the bishops seemed to speak another kind of language as well — a hybrid of theology and diplomacy. As far as one could tell from the twice-daily briefings, few bishops expressed their concerns in specific terms or gave concrete examples of what was bothering them. The particular was enveloped in general concepts; the debate seemed to take place at arm's length and by means of a set of code words.

Collegiality itself was a liberal word; so too was *subsidiarity*. Both were shorthand defenses of local churches against centralization, of episcopal conferences against Roman surveillance and interference. *Unity* was the conservative counterpart. Conservatives also leaned to complaints about *secularization*, although liberals might sometimes take a swipe in that direction. Where secularization led, *sense of the sacred* (as in "loss of") was seldom far behind. Liberals could be reliably identified by appeals for *ecumenism* or praise for *base communities*. Conservatives favored *integral*, as in *integral teaching* and *integral reception*. The latter referred to *the documents*. The conservative concentration on *the documents* was particularly interesting. Who could gainsay these heartfelt appeals that the conciliar documents in their entirety be studied throughout the church? Pastorally, however, the idea was not all that obvious. Here was a church facing poverty and illiteracy in many lands. barely able to get believers to read pastoral letters in other lands, still new to widespread familiarity with the Scriptures. Would masses of people really take up the documents of Vatican II? But *the documents* were something other than a pastoral proposal. The same people who recommended a return to the original documents could also endorse a

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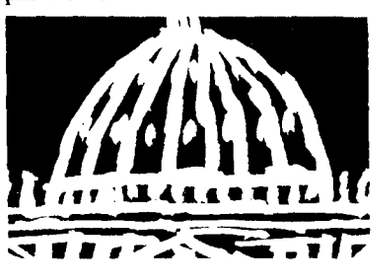
universal catechism, or official handbooks on the council, or new theological manuals. Documents, catechism, manuals, the Code of Canon Law — they were part of an impulse to freeze the council in a moment of time. Cardinal Ratzinger had pitted the "letter" of the council against its "spirit," or as he preferred, its "anti-spirit." The real opposition was between the advocates of the "letter" and those of *history*, which was the truly disturbing factor that the council had reintroduced into Catholic consciousness, the dangerous flux which the "letter," the code, the catechism, the manuals might possibly trap in their web.

The leading code words for debating collegiality, however, were *mystery* and *communion*. No one could deny the theological legitimacy of either concept as a description of the church. What was surprising was that no one apparently pointed out that both had obvious implications for control of ecclesiastical power. *Mystery* quite clearly appealed to conservatives because, in stressing the divine origin of God's gift of the church, it tended to secure the current forms of ecclesiastical organization from the critical eye of what was dismissed as "sociological" or "political" analysis. The church was a pillar of cloud by day, of fire by night. Not a few of those on the regular receiving end of Rome's authority might have thought of the image of smokescreen instead. *Mystery* could become mystification.

Liberals countered with the concept of *communion* – *koinonia*, fellowship. If *mystery* threatened to cloak hierarchical power in a cloud of incense, *communion* emphasized an equality of standing before God, a bond of love in Christ that should supersede relations of power. It had in it much of the quality of the image "people of God," which conservatives have increasingly resisted.

BOTH TERMS featured prominently in the synod's final report, indicative, I think, of a stand-off. "No Victors and No Vanquished" ran the headline over an upbeat story in the *New York Times*. "Who won the synod?" — Cardinal Law was quoted as saying — "I think the church won the synod." Perhaps there were no victors or vanquished, but I am not sure that means the church won either. Words like *mystery* and *communion* offer us rich theological fruit; it is in the current atmosphere of distrust that we bite down hard on the tough political kernel. It is that atmosphere that makes it difficult to achieve real dialogue between liberals and conservatives, to speak candidly of tensions and conflicts in the way Cardinal Danneels had begun to do, to take up problems of world-historical dimensions that all parties in the church recognize. (One is the separation of the link between sexuality and reproduction, a radical new step in the story, as old as civilization, of humanity's ambiguous emancipation from "nature" and a factor behind both the new claims of women and the disarray of sexual morality. Alas, when Archbishop Berg of Salzburg, Austria, spoke about "the problem of responsible procreation" and asked that "the concept of 'nature' . . . be more deeply studied," the ink was scarcely dry on the summary provided to the press when he issued a veritable recantation insisting that nothing he said should be taken as raising questions about *Humanae Vitae*. A more narrowly theological and ecclesiastical example was provided by the intervention of Cardinal Baum, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education. Baum spoke of the limits of historical criticism of Scripture and the need for an "ecclesial" exegesis. Hearing these remarks summarized at the press briefing, one liberal priest said, "I wish someone else had made that point" — i.e., Baum was indicating a real problem, but coming from the head of a congregation embroiled in efforts to control Catholic universities and with something less than a record of respect for independent inquiry, his observations were more likely to provoke anxiety than thought.)



SO FAR, so good? Yes. The synod was not a setback. In 1983, U.S. bishops went to Rome in connection with the peace pastoral and were told that episcopal conferences had no teaching authority. Since then, the conferences had been frequently dismissed as somehow illegitimate by conservatives. The synod both recognized their positive service and treated their teaching authority as at least deserving of theological study. The synod was punctuated by serious gestures of renewed concern for ecumenism. The flurry over whether or not it would compose its own final statement and, with the pope, issue it, was hardly earthshaking, the kind of thing that is elevated to importance when more fundamental decisions have been excluded. Nonetheless, the synod as an institution is a wee bit healthier now than before. "You can't say the church would have been better off *without* the synod," was the phlegmatic way one veteran of the conciliar and post-conciliar years put it. So far, so good.

But also so what? The synod's expression of concern for collegiality will probably not affect Rome's apparent determination to use its powers of appointment, its censure of theologians, its pressures on religious orders as it sees fit and quite regardless of the advice of America's bishops, to say nothing of any consideration for the views of the rest of us. In that respect, nothing has changed. Before the synod, Monika Hellwig wrote that we must look to it with "sober, even dogged, hope." Now I think we must evaluate it in the same spirit. The sober truth is that for most of us — to return to the pope's aims — the synod did *not* "revive in some way that extraordinary atmosphere of ecclesial communion" of Vatican II. We should not ask too much. Writing before the synod, George G. Higgins drew attention to a warning from Dom Aelred Graham in *The End of Religion*: "Spiritual renewal lies beyond the scope of administrative acts." Perhaps the synod we need is the one we would hold in our own hearts.

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A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

Theology & horses

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE

IN A MEMORABLE phrase in one of his poems, W.H. Auden brings together the sacred and the profane. The phrase occurs in *The Age of Anxiety*, and reads:

the real world of
Theology and horses . . ."

When I first came across this Baroque Eclogue, as Auden called it, I remember being reminded of John Wesley, who rode over 100,000 miles of the English countryside with a slack rein and got through a vast library of religious and secular books while in the saddle. Only twice did a horse of his stumble, and with a nice touch of practicality, characteristic of an itinerant preacher, Wesley advises others that it is "a capital blunder . . . to fancy that a tight rein prevents stumbling."

In the Christmas story the shepherds are the first to arrive and adore the Child in the manger. Despite the fact that this takes place in a stable, the appearance of a horse in Nativity paintings or poems is comparatively rare. One reason may be because, at the time of Christ's birth, horses were associated with warriors and war. Herod's soldiers set out on horseback to massacre the innocents; the Roman forces occupying Palestine patrol the towns and villages on horseback. Christ, in contrast, rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a donkey: neither the crowds nor the high priests would have missed the point.

In the Gospels themselves there is no reference in the Infancy narratives to an ox or an ass. Only the manger is mentioned. The twelve short verses of Matthew and the one from Luke, in which the story is rooted, have been expanded over the centuries. Blake speaks of holiness of the imagination, and poets and painters have used theirs about Bethlehem to inspired effect. In a different way the schoolmen of the Middle Ages filled out the Nativity texts of the New Testament by drawing on the Old. But between artists and theologians there have been fruitful crossings of thought.

A prophecy from the Book of Isaiah reads: "An ox knew his Lord, and an ass . . . knew of the Lord; but Israel did not know me." To the familiar animals of the crib others have been added, making it almost a second Noah's ark. These have included camels, lions, leopards, giraffes, elephants, apes, and peacocks. George Herbert, in one of his poems, brings a horse, too. For some of these additions there is scriptural backing. In the Book of Kings a reference to the city of Tarshish on the Red Sea, which may have been the home of some of the Magi, is followed by details of a king who lived there and whose ships carried abroad "gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks." Possibly a descendant of his was Melchior, who appears in tradition as one of the Magi, and who later acquires not only the attributes of royalty, but in some parts of the world has been given the status of a saint.

The celebration of Christmas unites the sacred with the profane; I am thinking of a pub in the Isle of Wight, off Southampton, where each December plaster figures of the Holy Family are brought out and placed in the window among the bottles of wine and cans of ale. The impact of the seen upon the unseen, so often the concern of spiritual writers, is here reversed: the plaster figures are the reminder of the unseen. At my parish church in London I like the colored glass baubles and garlands of silver tinsel which decorate the entrance and the sanctuary. In the Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem itself, lamps hidden in striped cotton bags hang from the ceiling, each with a colored ball beneath it. "How gaudy," remarked one woman. "I think they are charming," said another. "Not at all out of keeping in a church that honors a child."

At the center of the Christmas story is the paradox of the Child who is also God. How can the Infant in his mother's arms be omnipotent? Or, how is it possible that the Babe asleep in the straw can uphold the universe? These are the paradoxes with which theologians have grappled through the ages. They are part of the mystery of the Incarnation. But this mystery itself remains the same "yesterday, today, and forever."

The mystery of the Word becoming flesh does not alter, although our knowledge of the events surrounding it increases. Consider the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and how they have brought to light new facts about life in Palestine at the beginning of the first century A.D. They lead us to believe that Joseph was probably a young man when he was espoused to Mary, not the stooping, grey-bearded figure promoted by the church in medieval times. Also, Christ told his disciples many things they did not understand until after the Resurrection. His title Son of God carried with it a sense of generation; a recurring feature of the Gospel stories is the dependence of Jesus upon his heavenly Father. When he is still a boy and Mary and Joseph find him teaching in the Temple, he says to

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them: "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" At the Last Supper his final remark to Judas is: "The words you hear are not mine but my Father's." At Capernaum, early in his ministry, the people are astonished by the "authority" with which he speaks.

"O come let us adore Him." The theme of adoration runs through the twelve days of Christmas, in carols and in sacred music. The significance of Auden's phrase about the real world of theology and horses is that it challenges the customary orthodox definition of the sacred. There are many ways in which God may be adored, and if theology means thinking about God (as the Greek word suggests), then it should be possible to find God in all human experience. Bonhoeffer, who was a poet as well as a theologian, formulated for our times the paradox of "religionless Christianity." The late Cornelius Ernst, a Dominican whose unique theological essays should be read as a collection of poetry is read, carried Bonhoeffer's paradox a stage further. In writing of Wittgenstein he refers to "God's presence-in-absence in the world." It is a remark with a particular relevance for this century. For just as the eighteenth century, for example, was known as the Age of Reason, so ours, perhaps, has best been summed up by Auden as the Age of Anxiety. For such an age, in his Christmas Oratorio called *For the Time Being*, Auden offers two spiritual counsels. They are:

Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety
Love Him in the World of the Flesh.

Seeking and loving, in this context, describe exactly what the shepherds did at Bethlehem. In an early Wakefield morality play, an anonymous author of the thirteenth century makes one of the shepherds cry out:

Christ's cross me speed, and Saint Nicholas!

It is a bitter winter's night and the local lord is a harsh taskmaster. In the scene in question the cry is a mixture of exasperation and a prayer for help. But, in the wider setting of the poetry of the Middle Ages, the whole drama of Christ's birth, passion, and death is contained in the one line.

Screen

IMPOSSIBLE TASK

'SHOAH' RECALLS THE HOLOCAUST

COLERIDGE claimed in the *Biographia Literaria*, that the hardest truths to get people to feel deeply are the ones universally acknowledged. Only exceptional art saves such truths from the dull fate of complacent repetition.

Few subjects are worth a nine-hour movie. The Holocaust certainly qualifies. And Rene Lanzeman's *Shoah*, distributed for showing in two four-and-a-half-hour parts, uses its length to renew interest about an often cliché-ridden and overwritten subject. But as Coleridge would have it, Lanzeman here accomplishes something more difficult than originality: making the old new again.

Shoah is pertinent for several reasons. In the first place, the truth of the Holocaust is not universally acknowledged. We hear increasingly of denials of the event by neo-Nazis and their sympathizers. Elie Wiesel has written that to witness, to remember, is the only weapon against this intellectual barbarism. In the second place, the young — although more curious about Hitler and the Holocaust than most other epochs of history — have little concrete knowledge of what actually happened; if some can be persuaded to see *Shoah*, or at least a part of it, perhaps their ignorance can be significantly remedied.

Lanzeman probably had a different reason for making his documentary: the threat of natural death for the generation of survivors. Many of these, subjects of long interviews in the film, were born around 1920; in the early 1940s they were physically healthy enough to survive both the initial selections at the gas chambers and the later assaults on their well-being in the labor camps. Lanzeman's goal in *Shoah* (Hebrew for "holocaust") is to create a gigantic oral history by talking with these men and women, and by having them recreate in their own words exactly what happened. As an interviewer, Lanzeman is passionate about the details; his major question isn't *why*, but where, when, and more precisely, *how*. *Shoah* might better be called an anatomy of the Holocaust. Watching it, one begins to feel the palpable fact of the thing; over landscapes where somehow the sun still shines and the sky stands, all that atrocity really happened.

Daringly, Lanzeman does not use many images from the past. The camera in *Shoah* focuses primarily on the interviewees' faces, or their exchanges with the director, or purposely on bland images taken from the present — the charming little railway station at Sobibor, for example, with the same flower pots and commuter benches as in the 1940s, or the green-black woods near Treblinka where the slaughter (by guns, initially) first started. Lanzeman uses no newsreel foot-

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age, no still photographs, and few direct visual reminders from the past: one of the best half-echoes is the old railway link to Treblinka, now torn up and resembling nothing more than a country path. Most of Lanzeman's cinematography, in short, is visually "innocent"; only at Auschwitz do we see actual evidence of the events themselves. For the most part, his camera implies, all is forgotten — a suggestion that adds a sense of urgency to every word of the survivors. Lanzeman's technique is unlike any other Holocaust memorial, particularly the overstated NBC soap opera mini-series of several years back. Rather, stylistically *Shoah* resembles Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity*, which focused entirely on contemporary interviews with members of the resistance and with Vichy sympathizers in a small French city.

The result in *Shoah* is not boredom; denied the visual, the viewer is provoked to imagine, to join in the reconstruction of events rather than be a passive recipient of packaged horror. This is even more true because of the leisurely pace that Lanzeman employs; he carefully interrogates his subjects, asking them repeatedly to be exact about what happened — how camps were set up, for example, how the trains arrived (the Western European Jews came in passenger cars, it is claimed, and some even "dolled themselves up" before debarking), and finally how the extermination began. As Lanzeman alternates between stories of Treblinka, Sobibor, or Auschwitz, one begins to assemble a massive mental mosaic of the terrible efficiency of the SS and the terrifying experiences of its victims. Lanzeman's laborious understatement, in short, is designed to leave room for us to enter.

Lanzeman even manages a near impossible task, given the notoriety of his subject: he evokes suspense. This is mostly due to his interviewing technique. Accompanied by an interpreter, he often walks the ground or rail lines proximate to the camps, talking to Polish trainmen or farmers who either drove the Jewish prisoners to death or who witnessed their arrivals. As they talk to the interpreter in Polish, we in turn wait for her to translate to Lanzeman in French (which in turn, here, is translated into English subtitles). Similarly, many of the survivors, interviewed in Israel, discourse in Yiddish, often talking haltingly, with pained expressions, as though Lanzeman were opening scars; again, we have to wait to learn why.

Many stories are particularly affecting, especially those by survivors who witnessed the deaths of loved ones or who had to participate in the preparation or disposal of their bodies. One camp barber explains how he cut his wife's and daughter's hair silently, knowing full well this prefaced extermination; another survivor of a burial detail explains how he disposed of his wife's and children's bodies after they were asphixiated in a mobile gas chamber where they were "packed together like herrings." One survivor, Richard Glazer, now living in Switzerland, describes how he and several other young men were told to put their clothes back on after first being told to prepare for "showers" on arrival in Auschwitz; surviving the initial selection, they were detailed to stack the suitcases and clothes of the less fortunate who stayed naked. The whole process — off the train and into the "shower" area — took twenty minutes, Glazer reports. Worse than the screams, he says laconically, was their end.

Lanzeman does not spare to report instances of Polish and particularly Ukrainian anti-Semitism as a valuable tool of the SS. One elderly Polish woman, still living in the city of Auschwitz, seems coldly cynical in her casual description of Jewish "resettlement" (the town was 80 percent Jewish in 1939, and still has remnants of a lovely Jewish section). Some Polish farmers also cackle with glee describing how they informed train-trapped Jews of their fate (a hand across the jugular). Ukrainian guards are universally fingered by all involved as more brutal than many Germans in the operation of the camps.

Part of Lanzeman's point is that it is not easy to kill six million people. One of the prime interviewees in this regard is an ex-SS noncommissioned officer who granted Lanzeman an oral interview without realizing that Lanzeman's technicians could also get him on remote television. The SS man had already been tried as a war criminal before the interview, and, although acquitted, he feared further publicity. Ironically, he is not entirely unconvincing in his self-defense in *Shoah*. He recalls the initial days at Treblinka, after the shootings had stopped and the use of the mobile gas chambers began. He describes how he was detailed to clean up a messy burial site and begin cremation of the remains, claiming that it left him sickened. Some of this may be true: the SS high command invented the large gas chambers and the crematoria not only to

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speed the pace of the killing but also to anaesthetize it, to disengage their subordinates from its performance. What the Holocaust involved, *Shoah* records, was not just mass murder but the industrialization of death. Painstakingly rescuing the Holocaust from abstraction, Lanzeman makes it as real and as inhuman as an assembly line. TOM O'BRIEN

Stage

MAP READING

DAVID HARE, EXPLORER

WHEN Mel Gussow wrote his account of David Hare's work in the *New York Times Magazine* (September 29, 1985), the article was called "Playwright as Provocateur." It is an apt label if it can be extended or weakened to include not only Peter Hall's description of Hare as "one of the great disturbers" but also one who provokes in the sense of exasperates. The thing that many critics and players find troubling in Hare's work is that he gives them no clear place to stand. Artists are customarily praised for their complexity and ambiguity, but political playwrights are presumed to have answers, certainties that one can embrace or denounce. That is not the case with Hare. From the beginning of his career, he has been conducting an abrasive diagnosis of the ills of post-war England, but his plays and films do not offer a cure, only a longing for better health. In *A Map of the World* the uncertainties of both the world and the playwright are made explicit as one character after another speaks his heart or his mind or his cause only to have his words undercut by the next speaker or by himself.

The central conflict is between Victor Mehta, a celebrated comic novelist who writes about his native India from his comfortable English country home, and Stephen Andrews, a correspondent for a leftist literary magazine who suffers from an excess of feeling and platitude. They meet in Bombay in 1978, at a conference on poverty at which, somewhat incredibly, Mehta has been invited to give the keynote address and, somewhat more credibly, Andrews moves from irritated observer to mischief-making participant. Mehta is meticulous in dress and speech, an acid commentator on the imperfect third world from which he comes, an advocate and embodiment of order and rationality. Andrews is as untidy as Mehta is fastidious, sloppy in dress and thought, disenchanted with himself and his society. Andrews grows up in the course of the play, or so he says in the final confrontation between the two men. Perhaps because he comes to recognize what is best in Mehta, he begins to see his verbal concern for the poor and dispossessed as a kind of self-indulgence. He renounces the quarrel and proposes to act rather than talk, although he and the play are never very clear about the nature of his proposed action. Mehta, in his turn, sees that his rectitude is an excluding device that in separating him from imperfection separates him from life.

Roshan Seth, as Mehta, and Zeljko Ivanek, as Andrews, give excellent performances, so nicely conceived that audience sympathy tends to split according to the individual playgoer's prejudices about manner as well as matter. Ideally, one should recognize that Andrews's high-minded whine disguises genuine feeling and Mehta's wit and style an avoidance of commitment to anyone or anything outside his art. Yet, as Hare's *Plenty* indicates, audiences are reluctant to identify with a muddied image. Audiences of both the play and the movie version of *Plenty* tend to divide between those who see Susan as a victim and those who see her as a representative of the society she detests. She is presumably both.

The contest between Mehta and Andrews is not simply one of principle. It is Peggy Whitton, the free-spirited American actress, who persuades them to settle their differences in a man-to-man, mind-to-mind contest for which she will be the prize. She is one of the most incomprehensible characters in *A Map of the World*, and Elizabeth McGovern's eccentric playing of her does not help; most of the time, the actress hovers like an eager new waiter who has just dropped a tray of dishes. Peggy is a kind of slut-saint who suggests Susan's friend in *Plenty* or the young woman who moves in on the protagonist of Hare's film *Wetherby*. She is an image of disorder in its best (life-bringing) and worst (chaos-bringing) senses. Her freedom from guilt is finally recognized by her as a product of her unwillingness to make choices.

In the end, the Mehta-Andrews confrontation simply dissolves. Andrews gives up Peggy as well as an attempt to persuade Mehta that he should read a statement defining fiction as falsehood so that his remarks will be acceptable to the third-world delegates. Andrews's convenient offstage death draws Mehta from the conference, keeping him from speaking. This accident saves the participants from embarrassment, but it is clear that his speaking or not is unimportant. The conference will end in compromise in any case, the helpful gestures of the "haves" hedged by the condescension of power, the reluctant acceptance of the "have-nots" by the demands for rhetorical if not actual independence.

It is a softer Mehta who appears at the end of the play, one who still recognizes all that is corrupt and self-deluding in the work but who does not use that knowledge as a defense against life and feeling. His a very tentative statement, the best that one can expect from Hare. Not only has Andrews been unable to better his world; he has been killed in a gratuitous trainwreck as though not only Western society and its third-world copycats but the universe were in league against positive change. In *Knuckle* (1974), a parody of the Hammett-Chandler-Ross Macdonald kind of thriller, Hare's good-bad guy, unlike his counterpart in Bogart movies, is defeated by a society too wicked for the individual to fight. Yet, for all of *Knuckle*, Hare clings to the romantic possibility implicit in the borrowed figure. That possibility lies behind the schoolteacher's "we madmen" speech at the end of *Wetherby*, her call to return to the books which, on the evidence of the film,

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have failed to sustain the characters. It is why the final flashback of *Plenty*, the moment of bright promise at the end of World War II, is not only an ironic comment in the face of the Susan we have watched destroying herself and others, but a promise still. It is the very muted sound of hope in Mehta's final gesture, accepting the actors who, in the frame plot, are falsifying his account of events in Bombay.

What we get, then, are not those events nor Mehta's fictional version of them, but the play's reduction of them to a sellable story: world politics and ideological morality as a love triangle. Not that even, but Hare's play as a comment on making a movie about . . . and what do all those layers of misinterpretation and misunderstanding add up to? A suggestion, I am afraid, that everything I have written here is a contribution to the political, moral, sexual, and artistic confusions that so intoxicate Hare.

GERALD WEALES

Books: A COMPANY OF DAIMONS

WHAT'S BRED IN THE BONE
Robertson Davies
Viking, $17.95, 426 pp.

FIFTH BUSINESS
Robertson Davies
Penguin, $4.95, 266 pp.

THE MANTICORE
Robertson Davies
Penguin, $4.95, 310 pp.

WORLD OF WONDERS
Robertson Davies
Penguin, $4.95, 295 pp.

Robert Jones

THERE are any number of bad books by writers I admire on my shelves. Think of recent misses or near misses like Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings*, Gore Vidal's *Duluth*, or Joyce Carol Oates's *Mysteries of Winterthurn*. It is natural that any writer who is compelled to experiment and change course will come up with a clunker in the process of development. Especially with our most idiosyncratic writers, like Mailer or Oates or Vidal, one has almost come to expect that every other book will be dangerously flawed because these public failures are the necessary exercises by which they lay the groundwork for the next, more assured work.

It is an odd trust that is built up between these kinds of writers and their readers. Even when they leave us bewildered or impatient, there is often an implicit understanding that they know where they are going even when we miss the point. Doris Lessing's interplanetary explorations are to me unreadable, but there is no doubt that these strange novels are part of a total project. The critical leeway or suspension of final judgment given writers like Lessing has something to do with trust in their integrity and the belief that they may ultimately bring us to that shock of recognition that emerges when someone else's vision becomes our own. Eliade says in his journals that he has never been able to write the one book that spoke to his intentions, that one must read his entire oeuvre to understand what he meant. And so it is with our most difficult and prolific writers. Because of respect for the worth of the long view, one accepts the fits and starts, the interruptions and the doubling back, for the few times in which all the undefinable elements come together and in one or two startling books, a world emerges from their sight.

Occasionally, of course, a writer defies this protracted evolution and becomes possessed by one overriding idea or event that bursts forth in a single, enduring novel. Such writers spend the rest of their careers either in silence or in fitful attempts to reclaim whatever mysterious forces produced their first success. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is probably the most notable example from the recent past of the "one book" phenomenon, but Salinger also falls into this category. If one tolerates *Franny and Zooey*, it is only because of the residual goodwill generated by *The Catcher in the Rye*. Except for a few short stories, everything that followed Salinger's debut has been part of a slow freeze. It is possible that the entire myth of his reclusiveness has been built around his knowledge that he has nothing more to say.

But in allegedly "serious" fiction, it is virtually a unique occurrence to find a writer who was born to write one novel and yet who continues to produce at an astonishing rate. Canadian novelist Robertson Davies has written more than twenty-four books. His "Deptford Trilogy," consisting of *Fifth Business, The Manticore*, and *World of Wonders*, is his most widely known work in the United States, but it is *Fifth Business* alone by which he stakes any claim to respectability. His new novel, *What's Bred in the Bone*, is a peculiar rehash of everything he has done previously, but it is a caricature of his other books, like a hammy performance by a fading actor reduced to repeating his glory in small towns and sideshows.

Davies is the perfect example of what we have come to know as the "middlebrow" writer. He has prevailed because in the context of most glib, popular fiction, the issues he raises appear to be substantial. He has taken as his theme the idea of the supernatural, usually represented through the figure of the magician, and the tricks and turns of perception which reveal a world beyond that of appearances. In *Fifth Business*, the narrator says of his childhood, "But what I knew then was that nobody — not even my mother — was to be trusted in a strange world that showed very little of itself on the surface." The foundation of Davies's work has been the desire to lead his readers into this world of wonders, but he never penetrates beyond its surface.

His characters speak volumes (literally) about art, religion, and the meaning of life, but even in *Fifth Business*, he

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fails to follow the primary lesson of all fiction workshops: don't tell me, *show me*. All the references to Faust and damnation, to God and the afterlife, never amount to anything but glitter. To refer to oneself as "damned," as Dunstan Ramsay does in *Fifth Business*, is a different matter entirely from giving any indication through characterization or action of the state of damnation. Whenever the reader is treated to a lengthy conversation about God or the supernatural, he or she becomes lost in the voices. Unless each character is identified after each statement, it becomes difficult to determine who is speaking. They exist as mouths who lip-synch the author's views.

The writer Davies would most like to imitate is Iris Murdoch, but he lacks the sophistication of her best novels or the ease by which philosophical ideas become the backdrop to her characters' motivations. We don't feel the threat of Julian in *A Fairly Honorable Defeat* because Murdoch tells us he is evil, but by the way he so cheerfully and successfully victimizes each character. It is from Julian's ability to manipulate and conquer that we see the horror of a mechanistic universe, not from any chatter about the fate that determines our lives.

To read several of Davies's novels in succession is to suspect that he is no match for his intentions. He has clearly been struck by the presence of angels and demons, but he has never gone beyond the original perception. He pastes spirits onto the scenery and by that act attempts to persuade the reader that they exist. But they have no substance and become little more than another disappearing act in his bag of tricks. It is like sitting in a theater and seeing the props and settings and realizing after several hours that there will be no play.

As a writer, Davies may be the victim of his own conservatism. The unnerving message underlying the real, if precious, charm of The Deptford Trilogy, and which is increasingly manifested in his most recent novels, is that the fundamentalist view is essentially correct. The invisible universe is populated by angels and devils at battle for human souls. There is nothing to suggest that these spirits are meant as metaphors of benevolence or malevolence unloosed by human power and desire. Or that they represent a terrifying capacity to compromise with evil as we see in a book like Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*.

In Davies's work, and especially in *What's Bred in the Bone*, these spirits have personality. He believes in pitchfork-carrying devils and in angels who tell jokes. If his narratives seem structurally flimsy and pallid intellectually, and if his mechanistic view of the cosmos irritates rather than disturbs, it is because he has accepted as his vision the most retrograde view of human existence possible. He cannot create motivation in his characters or sustain dramatic tension because his understanding of the universe is antithetical to human action and responsibility. Since Davies sees people as cardboard cutouts pulled along by cosmic strings, his characters cannot be anything but flat, ventriloquist dummies. All the talk of Freud and Jung and the unconscious is a smokescreen for a determinist view that should be the delight of creationists the world over.

> *Men do not believe in matter today any more than they believe in God; scientists have taught them not to believe in anything. Men of the Middle Ages, and most of them in the Renaissance, believed in God and the things God had made, and they were happier and more complete than we. Listen, Corniche: modern man wants desperately to believe in something . . . on which to fasten his yearning for belief, for certainty, for reality.*
>
> —Robertson Davies
> *What's Bred in the Bone*

This is not to suggest that literature is the property of liberals. But the conservatism of writers like Waugh and Eliot evolved as a response to their particular experiences of the bleakness of modern life. Ideology ruins aspects of each of their work, but when they break through and render their vision meaningful, it is always in those moments when private opinion finds itself translated into something larger than the self and its tedious autobiography. It is impossible to understand much about the creation of art, or to determine how or why that odd confluence between writer and audience happens, but we know when it does.

We also know when it does not. Writers like Robertson Davies are concerned with pretentions to greatness and the compulsion to be Significant, not with art itself. If his work has never evolved from the one book by which he is best known, it is because of his basic misperception of ideology as in any way credible as a vision. His grandiloquent, quasi-nineteenth-century prose is an artificial attempt to find a style to match his moralizing about a past he fails to grasp historically, yet wields as an image by which he damns the present. His work gives no indication of the natural or instinctual play by which an author's voice speaks through the form. The structure of his novels has become increasingly creaky and full of gimmicks as he repeats the same ideas over and over within an identical framework.

BOTH *Fifth Business* and *What's Bred in the Bone* begin with a mystery about a central character and both seek to reveal their secrets by the retelling of that character's life. Both even share the device of a newspaper article in the opening scenes which is meant to demonstrate that the facts known about the character illuminate little about him. And they each include the birth of a hideous, misshapen child who haunts the action of the novel and who, perhaps unwittingly, betrays much about the mind of Robertson Davies.

In *Fifth Business* a pregnant woman is hit by a snowball as she walks with her husband and immediately gives birth to a premature, deformed child. The birth of the tiny monster unhinges this woman completely. She disappears from her sick bed, only to be found copulating with a tramp in the woods. When her bewildered husband asks the reasons for her betrayal, she replies, "He was very civil, 'Masa. And he wanted it so badly."

Davis clearly thinks he is making a coy joke by abbreviating the husband's name, Amasa Dempster, so that it sounds like a slave addressing a master

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when spoken. But this idea of women mindless dolts eager to succumb to a bum with a zipper never leaves us as clouds Dunstan Ramsay's quest for the great magician, Magnus Eisengrim. And once Ramsay finds himself under the spell of the magician and is finally able to seek answers to his questions about the supernatural, he experiences a crisis of belief. Not because he has glimpsed anything revelatory about another world, but because he stumbles upon Eisengrim's two women, Liesl and Faustina (get it?), embracing. The sight of the two women with legs and arms intertwined is enough to undermine Ramsay's entire quest for truth. As he says, "I have never known such a collapse of spirit even in the worst of war. And this time there was no Little Madonna to offer me courage or ease me into oblivion."

The devil is a woman. In case the reader fails to grasp Davies's point, he states it explicitly in a later conversation between Ramsay and Eisengrim. One begins to suspect that all the talk of damnation, of the mysteries of the universe, and the journey of the soul have nothing to do with theology or the life of the spirit, but with a dread of sexuality and an alarmist view of women as the "other." Suddenly all the references to harlots and virgins, to private parts and masturbation, become evident not as aspects of a vision, but as part of a private pathology.

WHAT is Robertson Davies trying to tell us? The life of Francis Cornish as portrayed in *What's Bred in the Bone* culminates in a castle owned by Saraceni, a shady Teutonic art collector. Francis, like Dunstan Ramsay in *Fifth Business*, has become an apprentice, but this time our hero yearns to discover everything there is to know about art. Enough scoundrels, prostitutes, Nazis, and plot contrivances abound to rival the convolutions of a grand opera (Goering even buys the fake triptych Francis paints in the style of the Old Masters), but as always with Davies, the real story comes down to the talk. Saraceni and Francis indulge their love of conversation with much bombast about the modern world versus the past, the role of art in society, and the misuses of tyranny and power. And while there is no suggestion that Davies admires the teachings of the German Reich, there is a confusion and ambiguity in Cornish's conversations with Saraceni that remain unsettling.

Be it the sorcerer's apprentice, the magician's apprentice, or the Nazi's apprentice, Davies is fascinated by servitude and the violence of the oppressor towards the oppressed. His view amounts to a kind of reactionary Darwinism with religion thrown in for good measure. In the hierarchy of domination, celestial bodies reign over the earth, the strongest men rule the weaker, and of course, even the feeblest wimp is the *sine qua non* master of women.

Or this is how life should be in Davies's zen heaven. Francis's spiritual guides, a recording angel and a daimon, frequently interject interpretations of events as they occur in the novel. These spirits are intended to represent opposing

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voices of reason in Francis's life and, by extension, the world itself. What, then, are we to make of the daimon's comment following one of Francis's and Saraceni's dialogues about art, "Those who find a master should yield to the master until they've outgrown him"?

Master and slave, oppressor and victim: these are the categories by which Robertson Davies imagines the world. History has taught us much about the truth of this dynamism, but seldom has the matter-of-fact benefit of slavishness to authority been embraced with such apparent reasonableness. The evolution of life is a ceaseless process of outwitting the opponent and struggling for position. The apprentice looks to the master to glean the tricks of appearances by which he gives the illusion of strength. But it is all a fantasy. This is why Davies is fascinated by magic. For him there is no netherworld to encounter, but only masks of deception, one giving way to another. The master is the one who learns to manipulate them and dazzle the observer with his sleight of hand.

We are left with a curiously despairing idea of experience, but one that includes neither tragedy nor even pathos. Its source is not hopelessness, but the rage of the insignificant man who has peeked into the void and glimpsed his essential powerlessness. So he dreams of greatness as a way back and worships those he believes have conquered the emptiness he has felt at the core of life. Davies's concept of apprenticeship is the act of initiation into this world of artifice and duplicity through which one learns the tricks of domination that others misbelieve as power.

This fragile control is proclaimed as the natural order of things because only such an extreme response to nothingness returns the world to a necessary, if illusory, harmony. And this is the source of Davies's misogyny. For all of his novels portray the figure of the crumbling, desperate man. What could be a more telling episode of this figure than Francis's reaction to his abandonment by his wife? He goes out onto the street to find a prostitute he can pay to beat up. One woman is the same as another. Each possesses a lethal magic to beguile away his power and unnerve the ground beneath him by restoring him to doubt.

To enter Davies's universe is like walking into a fun house and losing one's way among the mirrors. One feels the initial exhilaration of what might be a new way of seeing. But it is quickly replaced by the exhaustion of having spent too long among clever distortions, and one rushes to escape to the world of truer size. Davies's problem begins with his very understanding of art. As Francis Cornish engages in a bit of summing up ıe end of his life, he reflects upon his ıting and decides that, "the division ł ween art and deviousness and — yes, i ad to be admitted — crime, was sometimes as thin as a cigarette paper." In the circus, maybe. But to see art as a partner to crime is to give up entirely on whatever we might imagine as the possibility of truth. And it is to see the artist as that cliché of the explorer who flicks his lighter just before he is to be eaten by cannibals and finds himself hailed as a god.

Go tell it on the mountains

PROPHESY DELIVERANCE!
AN AFRO-AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY CHRISTIANITY

Cornel West
Westminster, $11.95, 185 pp.

Dennis P. McCann

IN THIS brief programmatic sketch Cornel West has produced the most promising Afro-American liberation theology to date. With his theoretical sophistication, his deep roots in Afro-American culture, and above all, his forthrightness in criticizing the intellectual traditions of Marxism and Christianity, West takes his rightful place among the architects of liberation theology, bold innovators like Mary Daly and Juan Luis Segundo. Whether we agree or disagree with their thinking, these religious intellectuals command our respect and admiration for having enlarged our sense of the possibilities and limits defining practical theological discourse.

Each of the chapters in *Prophesy Deliverance!* breaks new ground for Afro-American revolutionary Christianity in particular and practical theologies in general. Chapter One provides an interpretive framework for Afro-American history. West's distinctive contribution here is to postulate a "triple crisis of self-recognition" for black Americans, one that involves not just their alienation from the African homeland and the degradations of a slavery legitimated by racism. Blacks are also implicated, however marginally, in "the anxiety-ridden provinciality" that characterizes America's relationship to European culture. Consequently, West's historical interpretation strikingly makes our common American ambivalence about European modernity the ultimate horizon in which to interpret both the vicissitudes of the mainstream culture, and the struggles of Afro-Americans to achieve dignity and freedom within it and without it. Inspired equally by the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School and by Richard Rorty's rediscovery of the radicality of American pragmatism, West's sketch demonstrates the indispensable role of revisionist historiography for all Americans involved in critical reflection on praxis.

Chapter Two, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism," is equally provocative, if not equally convincing. Here Rorty's work of philosophical deconstruction provides the basis for arguing that "the initial structure of modern discourse in the West 'secretes' the idea of white supremacy." Here West contends that the fatal synthesis of modern scientific method, Cartesian epistemology, and neoclassical aesthetics resulted in "a normative gaze" that inevitably despises all things authentically African. Despite the indisputable evidence of racism in the seminal works of modern science, West's genealogy appears to be implausible and, quite possibly, counterproductive. On the one hand, there are simpler explanations of racism available, such as a massive repression of guilt by Christian slave-owners, Protestants and Catholics alike, whose pious self-

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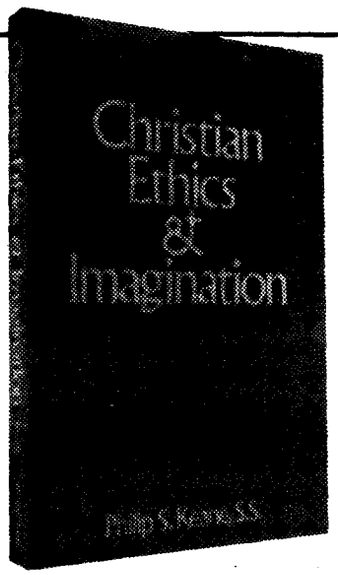
righteousness depended on justifying t blatantly intolerable evils of mode slavery; on the other hand, by identifyin white supremacy with the eros of modern scientific understanding, West unwittingly implies that Afro-American culture is inferior when examined according to this standard of judgment.

Be that as it may, the final three chapters advance the discussion in ways that stand or fall on their own merits. Chapter Three returns to Afro-American history to construct a typology defining four traditions of response within the black community to white racism. This typology allows West both to pinpoint the shortcomings of much of Afro-American culture, and to advocate more intensive effort within this community's "humanist tradition." Thus literary humanists, like Ralph Ellison, and socialists, like the young A. Philip Randolph and Rev. Herbert Daughtry, are seen as pathfinders in the process of cultural transformation. Chapter Four seeks to reconcile a form of Marxism with the theology of revolutionary Christianity. Though the synthesis as argued here remains too facile and disarming to convince those who are not already favorable to it, West's insistence that "Christianity and Marxism are the most vulgarized, distorted traditions in the modern world" raises hopes that in his hands their confrontation will be unflinchingly self-critical as well as liberating in intent.

By way of conclusion, Chapter Five redefines the situation of praxis by plotting a path for Afro-American revolutionary Christianity "between the Scylla of bourgeois liberalism and the Charybdis of right-wing Marxism." While West is evenhanded in rejecting both alternatives, his typology defining the internal conflicts within the Marxist tradition is the most insightful and useful clarification of that tradition yet developed within the literature of liberation theology. West explicitly repudiates the totalitarian forms of praxis that have dominated Marxism since Lenin's consolidation of power in the Soviet Union. Equally explicit is his complaint against European intellectuals and bourgeois politicians whose commitment to Marxism remains in the realm of pure theory. Instead, he commends the left-wing Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg's "Counilism" because it seeks to institutionalize the values of individuality nd democracy even while empowering he oppressed for collective action. Only this form of Marxism, in West's view, is compatible with the authentic aspirations of Afro-Americans. No other practical theologian advocating Marxist "social analysis" has been as forthright as West in acknowledging the problems that Marxism's own praxis poses for "revolutionary Christianity."

A hallmark of truly innovative thinkers is their ability to challenge the reader's own self-understanding. Who one is and is not becomes painfully clear in serious conversation with, to use Antonio Gramsci's words, an organic intellectual. I come away from reading West grateful for having encountered a genuinely Christian patriot, still deeply committed to the revolutionary promise of America.

Yet my gratitude is mixed with consternation, for the America that he describes consists almost exclusively of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture of a once dominant elite and the subversive memories and liberating hopes of the Afro-American masses. The struggles of the rest of us — among others, the bewildering variety of immigrant tribes, Catholic and Jewish — perhaps aren't revolutionary enough to warrant his attention. So I end up hoping that West will grow in his appreciation for the pluralism of American culture. Similarly, I come away encouraged to find a philosopher not embarrassed by the refreshing vitality of American pragmatism. Beyond its epistemological radicalism, however, pragmatism may yet suggest to West more penetrating insights into the "petit bourgeois" liberalism with which so many of his Afro-American brothers and sisters keep the faith. So I end up hoping that West will join other American pragmatists like Reinhold Niebuhr in criticizing Marxism's outmoded dogmas of class struggle. That, indeed, would be to *Prophesy Deliverance!*, not just for Afro-Americans but for all the rest of us.



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Christianity & social vision

CREEDS, SOCIETY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS
A STUDY IN THREE CULTURES
Max L. Stackhouse
Eerdmans, $19.95, 315 pp.

Margaret E. Crahan

BOOKS written with certainty tend to have considerable vitality. Such is the case with this book, which views human rights as rooted in creed and social membership. To Stackhouse, the existence of human rights implies that there is a universal moral order in which all peoples and societies exist. In fact, Stackhouse regards the increased focus on human rights in recent years as indicating the growth of a universal "doctrine" of human rights that contradicts utilitarianism and theories that emphasize relativism in behavioral norms. The author further believes that this doctrine of human rights is evolving into what might be thought of as a creed, a set of beliefs that is widely accepted and can be employed to determine ethical behavior for both individuals and communities.

Stackhouse came to this conclusion largely through comparative study of sectors of three distinct societies and their cultures. These include the United States, Eastern Germany, and India. Each was analyzed via what Stackhouse categorizes as a longitudinal, cross-sectional, and evaluational methodology. By longitudinal, he means a search for the roots of ideas and social patterns that mold concepts of human rights. It is not a historical recreation of the past, but rather a selective extrapolation which the analyst deems to have explanatory relevance. Hence, the original hypotheses and inclinations of the author tend to influence substantially what is considered important in the interplay of factors over time.

The second methodology used is labeled cross-sectional and aims at analyzing the dominant stuctures of a specific culture in order to establish universal elements without diminishing the individuality of that culture. Stackhouse uses as his point of departure the premise that society has to meet certain social needs that all humans have. The effort is affected by biophysical environment, mythological or creedal assumptions, and individual and communal social interactions. The author posits that within different societies there are structurally similar functions, roles, and institutions created to meet social needs. They exist on three levels — the material, the associational, and the ideational. In addition, there are three distinct structural types: interpersonal, civilizational, and collective.

Through a map of these elements, Stackhouse compares the evolution of human rights in Christianity as it exists in the U.S., in Marxism as it exists in East Germany, and in Hinduism as it exists in India. Marxism is categorized as a religion, which Stackhouse defines as a broad metaphysical-moral vision. Within each culture, the author identifies institutional sectors that meet specific social needs and that reflect the dominant creeds and forms of social bonding. Together these processes and structures mold each society's operative concept of human rights.

The third methodological approach used is evaluation. The question posed here is whether Christianity, Marxism, or Hinduism more adequately deals with the fundamental structures of human life. The author's conclusion is that Christianity succeeds in prompting societies to meet social needs better and hence promotes human rights more effectively than Marxism or Hinduism.

In coming to this conclusion, Stackhouse is fulfilling a prime purpose in writing this book, namely, to try to convert the public to a commitment to reform societal structures according to a Christian vision, in order to achieve a more humane world. A second objective is to reach students, whom Stackhouse feels are surprisingly unaware of the role of religion in history and the importance of Christianity in responding to economic, political, educational, and familial problems which in essence are human rights problems. The author's intention in doing this is to help prepare church leaders to be better equipped to deal with critical problems of modern society. However, at the end of his highly complex analytical journey through three separate cultures, the author expresses far more certainty of vision than the

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reader has derived from the text.

Stackhouse's view of the nature and origins of human rights is generally narrower than that of most scholars. While what he affirms about the relationship between Christianity and human rights is insightful, he tends in his conclusions to diminish the contributions of other religions to the universality of human rights. Hence, while Stackhouse's book is stimulating, it ultimately judges non-Christian cultures and societies as deficient. This, as a consequence, is a book that reverses itself somewhat by concluding with an expression of support for a particular faith, rather than in a strong affirmation of the universality of human rights that transcends cultural and religious differences.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 690)

be the "nod" part, and we shrug. There are more important things to do than to worry about Ratzinger papering the house, writing the agenda, and having general hysterics over whatever it is he's afraid of today; we have a tough decision to make about where to hold the car wash the youth committee is having this Saturday. You see, the kids want to give the money they earn to somebody who needs it badly. That car wash is, therefore, important because the kids are doing it without being ordered to do it. They're doing it because, as one of them said, "Isn't this what it's all about? That stuff about 'discipleship,' I mean." That, also, is an opinion about the results of Vatican II. ROSEMARIE BRICKLEY

Closing the windows?

Cambridge, Mass.

To the Editors: As an avid *Commonweal* reader for what must be decades now I have naturally been following with keen interest your series of articles leading up to the synod, including the round-up of the twenty opinions in your October 18 issue. Have I missed it, or have you for some reason not asked any non-Catholics for their views on this subject? While they were not so identified, *all* the writers in the October 18 issue appeared to me to be Catholics.

I find this a bit sobering, not a very hopeful straw in the wind as we approach a synod which some fear will repeal many of the ecumenical advances of Vatican II. Do the editors of *Commonweal* believe, or think their readers believe, it doesn't really matter what the rest of us think about this? Has the enormous impact of Vatican II on all of us so shrunken in memory over twenty years that its review, revision, and possible recantation now seem to be a strictly Catholic affair? What's going on?

It is bad enough to watch John Paul II solemnly declare that non-Catholic Christians have to be approached in "a missionary spirit." It is sad enough to have those Catholic and Protestant scholars who teach in each other's seminaries opening their mail with trepidation lest some curial agent may be informing them they should no longer be teaching there. Will the next step be that Catholics will once again hesitate to come to funerals in Protestant churches or (as was the case when I was a kid) fear to enjoy the pot-luck suppers in the Baptist church basement? Where will it end?

We have all learned so much and been so powerfully cheered by the revival that has taken place in the Catholic church, worldwide. It is a Catholic theological perspective, the "preferential option for the poor," which has become the dominant theological mood in the member churches of the World Council of Churches. When John XXIII opened the window, we *all* benefited from the fresh air that swept in. If it is closed we will all begin to suffocate again. I have never really felt too secure about my standing with the Curia, but I do hope *Commonweal* does not abandon me as well.

HARVEY COX
Harvard Divinity School

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More than good works

Kailua, Hawaii

To the Editors: I applaud *Commonweal*'s "From the Council to the Synod" [October 18]. How refreshing to read the constructive remarks of those who remain devoted to the church, in spite of its adolescent flounderings and serendipitous liturgies.

Of all the contributors, Keith Burris speaks most eloquently with more seriousness than satire. The "happy chat" Mass does exist, "egocentrism" abounds, and a "sense of holiness" is truly difficult to find. Reverence for the sacred is misappropriated for devotion to television and the movies. We are as bureaucratic as ever under a new guise.

If we become a church known only for social action—a noble and necessary addition since Vatican II—we are merely another goodwill agency. Let us regain our spirituality and reverence, and heed the criticism so valiantly stated by these writers. PATRICIA A. SULLIVAN

Unfinished business

Montreal, Canada

To the Editors: I must correct the statement of Jack Miles ["From the Council to the Synod," October 18] that I became an Episcopalian. With my family I have worshipped in Anglican churches for periods of some length as well as on isolated occasions. I also have good reason to be grateful to Anglicans for the practical and unpossessive friendship they have shown me. Anglicans have achieved a distinctive quality of Christian life and love, which I admire. All the same, though I have considered the sibility, I have never formally becom Anglican. The reason is partly that formal process for entering any partic Christian denomination is meaningle me, and partly that the Anglican iden is not my own, however much I resp it. In brief, the differences among t major Christian denominations are to me of no greater importance than that between communities of the same denomination. Hence, while respecting unity in essentials, I feel free to choose inessentials according to my cultural background and identity.

On another point Jack Miles has hit the mark in saying that I did not claim that it was necessary to leave the Catholic church, but only that it was not necessary to stay in it. I would only add what I also said in 1966 that those who remain have a special duty to oppose the untruth, injustice, and violations of human dignity in their church. I remain distressed by the passive submission of many to the attitudes and actions of their ecclesiastical organization. You ask what is the most essential unfinished business still facing the Catholic church today. I suggest that the great unfinished business is for the church to create in its own structure and life a model of community, which will serve to guide and sustain the building of human community in this divided world. The Catholic church talks much, but then contradicts in its structure, policy, and action what it says. There is much good will and effort on the part of bishops to do what is required, but their best initiatives flounder because an obsolete authority structure both prevents creative innovation and destroys plausibility. We hear frequent expressions of outrage among atholics at particular instances of clesiastical oppression, but the only nsistently sustained criticism of the esent set-up of the Catholic church is ae feminist insistence on the absurdity and injustice today of having the Catholic church ruled by a male celibate clergy. The only real success for the forthcoming synod would be if the bishops were to tear apart that synod's present structure.

CHARLES DAVIS

Celebrate life

Berkeley, Calif.

To the Editors: Juli Loesch's defense of the much abused and largely ignored *Humanae Vitae* [October 18] hit a nerve with me. Her notion of the "inviolability of the human design" is indeed the mind of the church. It is the mind of the church not to mess with Mother Nature. Artificial birth control, abortion, euthanasia, the cleavage of the sexual act from its intended result, unnecessary hysterectomies — all of these are violations of the human design. They are expressions of hatred for the innermost functions of the human body, for life itself. They represent the medical arm of the same Dr. Death who hovers over the machinery of Total War.

Some time before I finally converted to the Catholic faith, I found myself one morning in front of a French Catholic church in San Francisco. I had been ruminating on intellectual things: the pope and politics; the theory of monks; is Jesus God? What I saw as I walked through the doors was shocking — every available space was jammed with alabaster Christs with crimson paint dripping down their faces, Marys with rosy cheeks and rosaries hanging from their arms, saints and technicolor angels. It was all a blatant celebration of the body in its deep joys and deeper pains.

One thing about this Catholic church, I figured (once I had recovered from my shock): It looks birth and death right in the eye, and doesn't blink. And it has a place for human passion, human love, and human heartache. I think the church holds it to be a clear mistake to try to reach God by rejecting nature, and especially by rejecting nature's appointed

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times for birth and love and death. The church contains the whole of what is human, as God contains the whole of the universe.

THOMAS W. CASE

'Creative orthodoxy'

Los Angeles, Calif.

To the Editors: It was refreshing to read Juli Loesch's frank piece [October 18] on her negative experiences and assessments of contraception. I view her writing as an example of the growing movement for "creative orthodoxy" now gaining prominence, often spearheaded by "reformed sinners."

In this spirit may I recount that as an atheist college student in 1957, I was amazed and ecstatic when a friend told me that her doctor father had given her a new astounding pill which would enable her to have as much pre-marital sex as she wanted without fear of babies.

Even as a Catholic convert, with one-year-old twins, a miscarriage, and a doctor who suggested I recheck Catholic teaching and get on the pill, I was näive. It sounded pretty good to me. However, having made my way to acceptance of the teaching authority of the church by means of such logical thinkers (creatively orthodox) as Chesterton, Lewis, Newman, and von Hildebrand, I was more than ready to accept *Humanae Vitae* and to study with openness the books that began to emerge after *Humanae Vitae* by Derrick, von Hildebrand, Grisez, Anscombe, Shivinanden, Kippley, etc., showing how wrong contraceptives could be on all levels.

I still find it most distressing to find dissenters from *Humanae Vitae* who have never read these books or any defending the position of the magisterium, and who take it for granted that Natural Family Planning is a farce in spite of non-Catholic medical studies of its effectiveness.

RONDA CHERVIN
Consultant to U.S. Bishops
Pastoral on Concerns of Women

Sacrament of wisdom

Park Ridge, Ill.

To the Editors: The differences of opinion of scholarly people make interesting reading. But in all those words of wisdom ["From the Council to the Synod," October 18], none commented on Christ's strategy for laying the foundation for unity and continuity in his church.

When Jesus instituted the Eucharist during his final meal, he forced every "expert," every "theologian," every "activist" to make a choice, i.e., whether they would subordinate judgment to the priority of submission, the reception of his body. Could he have foreseen Vatican II?

EDWARD F. HALPIN

Missing the obvious

Boston, Mass.

To the Editors: I have enjoyed *Commonweal*'s attempts to "chart a course from the council to the synod," and appreciate much of the material contained in this series of articles.

I realize that an entire article was devoted to women, and it was well done; however, I am stunned that an article entitled "Spirituality in Ferment" [October 4], could possibly be published without any mention of women, changing images of God, and the host of issues that have truly been fermenting in the American church as women struggle to find the place God intended when they were created "in the image of God."

EILEEN REILLY, SSND

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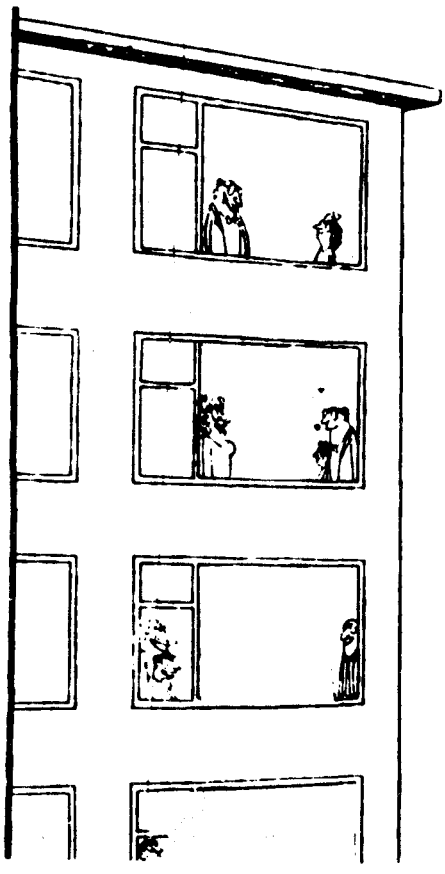

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